

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1. Preface

The Augusta-Richmond County Comprehensive Plan is a long-range plan for managing and guiding Augusta's development over the next 20 years. The Plan examines the existing conditions affecting development, enumerates the needs and goals for the future development of the city, and spells out the strategy for addressing the needs and achieving the goals. The Plan serves as a basis for local decision making regarding development and as a general resource for information about the present and future condition of the city.

The Augusta-Richmond County Comprehensive Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning effective on February 1, 2002 and administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. The city must prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan that meets these standards in order to retain designation as a Qualified Local Government. Designation as a Qualified Local Government makes the city eligible to apply for certain loan and grant programs administered by state agencies.

The Augusta-Richmond County Comprehensive Plan is the first plan update prepared by the City. The original comprehensive plan developed under state guidelines was adopted in 1992. At the time, the City and County were separate political subdivisions, but agreed to jointly develop a comprehensive plan. In 1994, the City and County amended the Plan to incorporate a strategy to protect the Savannah River Corridor. This amendment was made in response to changes in the state guidelines. A new five-year Short Term Work Program was developed and adopted in 1997. Other recent planning efforts include publication of an updated land use and public facilities plan for the area covering the former county in 1995, and updated neighborhood plans for the former city in 1995 and 1996.

A plan update is not required until the year 2008. However, the City decided that an update is necessary because conditions, trends and needs in the city have changed drastically in recent years. The changes occurred primarily as result of the 1996 consolidation of Augusta and Richmond County. The resulting municipality's issues and concerns are not reflected in the plan. Also, the release of the 2000 Census provides an opportunity to review trends with relatively new data. Under an agreement with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (see April 17, 2001 memo to Mayor Bob Young), the City agreed to update the Plan by October 2003, with the understanding that the Plan will be updated again in 2008 in compliance with the state's schedule.

1.1 Public Participation

The Comprehensive Plan update started with a series of five meetings with major stakeholders. The meetings were held on various dates between August 2000 and January 2001. Identified stakeholders included representatives from neighborhood

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associations, development organizations, realtors, builders, utilities, environmental organizations, the county school board, and interested private citizens. A committee of Planning Commission members met with the stakeholders to begin the process of identifying issues to address in the Plan.

Between October 25 and December 3, 2001 the Planning Commission held a series of ten public hearings throughout the city to kick-off the plan update process. A second series of eleven hearings was held during September 2002 to review issues and opportunities, obtain feedback on draft goals, objectives and strategies, and review the accomplishments on the 1998-2002 Short Term Work Program. In July 2003 a final round of three public hearing was held to receive feedback on the draft comprehensive plan. Subsequently, the draft was transmitted to the Central Savannah River Area Regional Development Center and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for review and comment.

1.2 The Planning Process

The Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures require that the Comprehensive Plan be prepared in accordance with a three-step planning process. As outlined in the Georgia Department of Community Affairs regulations, the three steps in the planning process are Inventory and Assessment, Statement of Needs and Goals, and Implementation Strategy.

1.2.1 Step 1 - Inventory and Assessment

This step is designed to answer the question "What do we have as a community?" A profile of existing conditions is necessary in order to plan for the city's future. Information is required on existing conditions in the areas of population, housing, economic development, transportation, community facilities and services, natural and historic resources, and land use in order to complete the community profile.

1.2.2 Step 2 - Statement of Needs and Goals

This step is designed to answer the question "What do we need or want for the future of the community?" Based upon the inventory and assessment, existing community needs are identified and goals and objectives for future growth and development are prepared. The goals provide a vision for the city and a framework for developing more specific strategies and policies to address the needs.

1.2.3 Step 3 - Implementation Strategy

This step is designed to answer the question "How are we going to get to our desired future as a community?" It combines all of the plan's recommendations and describes how they will be implemented. The Short Term Work Program is an integral part of the

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Implementation Strategy. The Short Term Work Program includes the specific programs and projects that the city and other stakeholders will implement over the next five years to carry out the plan. The Implementation Strategy and Short Term Work Program ensure that the plan is a useful decision making tool and not a document that sits on a shelf.

1.3 Plan Elements

The planning process is applied to each of the six planning elements required by the Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures. In addition, a transportation element is added due to the importance of this issue to the future of the city and the fact that transportation planning has been an integral part of the community for over 35 years. Note also that the Natural Resources / Greenspace and Historic Resources elements are separate from one another. While these issues are interrelated, separate chapters are needed to give adequate attention to them. The plan elements are as follows:

1.3.1 Population

This element documents historic population trends, current population characteristics, and projected population in Augusta-Richmond County. Specific items addressed include total population, number and type of households, age distribution, racial composition, level of education, and income. The inventory and assessment of the population serves as a foundation for the other five plan elements and helps in determining community facility needs employment opportunities, housing needs, and potential impacts on natural and historic resources.

1.3.2 Housing

This element includes an inventory and assessment of the city's housing stock. It begins with an overview of residential development patterns and housing unit trends in Augusta. Census data is used to profile housing unit characteristics including the number of units, tenure, age, cost and general condition. The housing needs of the homeless are also highlighted. Finally, housing production and programs are reviewed that involve the private sector, the city, non-profit organizations, and the local public housing authority.

1.3.3 Economic Development

This element includes an inventory and assessment of the city's economic base, labor force, and economic development opportunities and resources. Economic characteristics reviewed include current employment, wage levels, income, labor force participation, occupations and commuting patterns. Employment projections are used as one indicator of expected economic growth, and the city's role in the regional economy is highlighted.

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The chapter concludes with a summary of the resources (agencies, technical assistance, and funding) that are available to address economic development needs.

1.3.4 Transportation

This element includes an inventory and assessment of transportation facilities and services. Transportation facilities reviewed include the street and highway network, railroads, airports, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and public transit. Census data provides information on the travel characteristics of workers. Information from the regional travel demand model and other reports offers insight into the problems on streets and roads. The final section summarizes the plan for future improvements to each of the major transportation facilities and services.

1.3.5 Community Facilities and Services

This element includes an inventory and assessment of public facilities and services provided by the city and other public and private organizations. Existing conditions and needs are identified for such facilities as the water and sewerage systems, public safety, solid waste, schools, and libraries and other cultural facilities. An inventory of hospitals and other public health facilities is also included.

1.3.6 Historic Resources

This element includes a brief overview of the city's history, followed by an inventory and assessment of historic resources. Resources covered include National Register and local historic districts and properties and archaeological resources. A summary of ongoing activities indicates that many individuals and organizations are actively surveying, documenting, preserving and adaptively reusing historic resources. The element concludes with a general outline of historic preservation needs.

1.3.7 Natural Resources / Greenspace Program

This element includes an inventory and assessment of natural and environmentally sensitive resources in the city. Topics addressed include topography, soils, agricultural land and forestland, air quality and water resources. It also identifies the issues, problems and opportunities associated with these resources. The city's Greenspace Program is also integrated into this element of the plan. The element concludes with a general assessment of natural resource and greenspace program needs.

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1.3.8 Land Use

This element includes an inventory and assessment of existing land use in the city. It begins with an inventory of land use, highlighting the factors and trends affecting local land use. Land use patterns have contributed to blight and lack of investment in some parts of the city, increased demand on public facilities, and impacted the natural environment and quality of life. The element also offers some suggestions regarding opportunities for infill development. The estimated acreage of each of the land use categories is calculated and projections are made of the amount of land required to meet future demands. The element concludes with a list of the general policies that apply to local land use decision making. The policies are meant to implement the broad goals included in the implementation strategy.

1.3.9 Implementation Strategy

The Plan's Implementation Strategy combines the answers to the three basic questions that are integral to the planning process. Goals, needs and strategies are enumerated for each of the plan elements. This is followed by a description of methods used to assure coordination of plan implementation. The Implementation Strategy concludes with the five-year Short Term Work Program. The Short Term Work Program identifies the specific projects, including estimated cost and responsible entities, to be undertaken during the next five years to address plan needs and goals.

Augusta will continue to change as time goes by. Changes will be monitored and the Plan will be amended as the need arises. At a minimum, the Plan will be updated in the year 2008 in accordance with the schedule for plan updates maintained by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.